

IF I DIE BEFORE I WAKE. . .

The Life I Was Meant to Live (Pt. 1)

Small Group Questions

Introduction: what are the characteristics would you use to describe the perfect life?

- 1. Read 2 Timothy 1:10 & 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Do you believe God wants us to understand heaven? Why has He not revealed more about heaven?**
- 2. Read Galatians 3:24. From what you understand of the Old Testament Law how does it help us to understand the person and ministry of Jesus?**
- 3. If you have a concordance, do a word search for “Sheol” in the Old Testament. What do some of those passages tell us about the ‘realm of the dead?’**
- 4. Read Romans 3:25,26; Hebrews 9:15, 10:1-4, 11:16. What do these passages tell us about those living under the Old Covenant?**
- 5. Read 1 Peter 3:18-20 & Ephesians 4:8-10. Do these passages support the claim that Jesus went to Hades when he died? What questions do you have about the three days Jesus spent in the grave?**
- 6. Does this message give you comfort about issues of death or does it generate more questions? What questions do you still have? Is it enough to trust God for the things we don’t yet have answers for?**

Where do you go when you die? There's both a simple and a complicated answer to that question. No mind has conceived what God has prepared, but His Spirit has revealed it to us. There are things we can know through the revelation of scripture. We can't know all of it but we can know what God has revealed. Sometimes it just requires a little digging.

2 Tim. 1:10 (NIV)

it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Jesus talked a lot about heaven. Take notice when you read the parables. Most of the parables begin with Jesus saying, "the kingdom of heaven will be like. . ." and then he tells us a story. Most of us make immediate application of the stories to life on earth. But Jesus was also giving us a glimpse of what heaven will be like. The parables are like windows into heaven that we can peak through.

1 Thes. 4:13 (NIV)

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep.

The term, 'fall asleep' is a euphemism for dying because you never really die in the sense that you cease to exist. When the body is dead it looks like it's sleeping, but friends, the spirit that once occupied that body has never been more alive. So, Jesus brought immortality to light, Paul doesn't want us to be uninformed about death. So what do we know for sure? We know that when you and I die, our spirits and our bodies separate. The bible tells says we will get new bodies. And the Bible also tells us that we will be reunited with Christ and with each other.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, ^(A) that you may not grieve as others do ^(B) who have no hope.

In the first century it was a common belief that Jesus would return in their life time and when Christians started dying before the second coming it raised a lot of questions and anxiety. And the main concern was, What happens after you die? Paul explains that.

¹⁴For ^(C) since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him ^(D) those who have fallen asleep.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. So, those who are present with the Lord will come with Him at the second coming.

¹⁵For this we declare to you ^(E) by a word from the Lord, ^(a) that ^(E) we who are alive,

Paul doesn't say, those who are alive, Paul said 'we.' Even Paul believed, or at least he hoped he would be alive at the return of Christ. Paul always anticipated the return of Christ in his lifetime too. All of us should anticipate the return of Christ in our lifetime.

We who are alive who are left until ^(G) the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For ^(H) the Lord himself will descend ^(I) from heaven ^(J) with a cry of

command, with the voice of^(K) an archangel, and^(L) with the sound of the trumpet of God. And^(M) the dead in Christ will rise first.

Paul is talking here about the second coming of Christ. And he's telling us that those of us left here will join those who have gone before.

¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be^(N) caught up together with them^(O) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so^(P) we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The question before us today is, "Where do Christians go when they die?" Do we lie in the grave until Jesus comes back? Is there a holding tank for all of us until Jesus comes back.

Where Do I Go When I Die? PARADISE

Jesus called it Paradise in Luke 16. Paul called it Paradise in 2 Corinthians 12. Jesus said to the thief of the cross, today you will be with me (where?) in paradise. The question is, "What is paradise? Where is paradise? Is paradise the same as heaven?" In the Old Testament when people died they went to Hades. The Hebrew Bible calls it Sheol. It means the realm of the dead, or the place of the unseen dead. You and I hear the word Hades and we think of a place of suffering or punishment. This is partly correct. We looked at the story in Luke 16 where the rich man died and went to hades, and Lazarus died and went to the bosom of Abraham. But they were in the same place. They could see each other, they could converse. They couldn't cross over from one section to another, but they were in the same place.

Before The Crucifixion

If Jesus was accurate in his Luke 16 story, it would seem that the realm of the dead was comprised of two compartments; the place called Hades, and the place called the bosom of Abraham.

Hebrews 10:1-4; Luke 16:19-31; Psalm 16:9-11; Luke 23:43

One of the things we need to keep in mind is, that before Jesus died there was no complete forgiveness of sins. Sin, until the cross had never been atoned for. So, if you died without having your sins forgiven, can you go to heaven? What's the answer to that? No. No one can stand in the presence of God with sin.

Hebrews 10:1-4 For since the law has but^(A) a shadow^(B) of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities,^(C) it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ²Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³But^(D) in these sacrifices^(E) there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴For^(F) it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Why did Old Testament believers offer sacrifices? They did so in obedience to the law that rolled back their sins, if you will, held back the judgment of God because they offered these sacrifices in faith, looking forward to a 'once and for all' sacrifice that would be complete. They offered their own lamb without blemish in the hope that one

day the perfect lamb of God would take away the sins of the world. Not until the blood of Jesus was shed was any person ever actually or absolutely forgiven. And the Old Testament saints, though they didn't know how this would come about, believed that one day that promise would be fulfilled.

Psalm 16:9-11

**⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.**

**¹⁰For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.**

David is talking about himself, while at the same time prophesying about the Messiah. David believed he would not spend eternity in Hades. And he was prophesying that the Messiah would also not be abandoned in Hades.

**¹¹You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

He's referring to heaven. So, Hades (verse 10) will not hold him forever and eventually he will experience heaven, that's what David is saying here. Old Testament believers got their sins forgiven the same way we get our sins forgiven: through the blood of Jesus. In Romans Paul said that God had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. Why? Because: the cross hadn't happened yet. That's the grace of God. They called it the Passover, the Passover lamb. Why? Because: God passed over the sins of the people without either punishing or forgiving them. Until, at just the right time, Christ died. So, until the crucifixion, they lived in a period of forbearance, not a period of actual forgiveness. That's why it says in Hebrews that they were commended for their faith because they believed even though they had not yet received the promise. That's why David rejoiced that God would not abandon his soul to Hades. He believed that one day the messiah would make a way for him into the presence of God. And that day came. Jesus hung on the cross and said to the one who placed his faith in him,

Luke 23:43

⁴³And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in ^(A)Paradise."

The Resurrection

A couple of years ago we studied this letter and came across a passage of scripture that was so very difficult to understand. And I remember thinking to myself, I'm so glad that's over, I don't want to have to deal with that passage again. And here we are.

1 Peter 3:18-20

¹⁸For Christ also ^(A)suffered ^(B)once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, ^(C)that he might bring us to God, being put to death ^(D)in the flesh but made alive ^(E)in the spirit, ¹⁹in which ^(B)he went and ^(E)proclaimed ^(B)to the spirits in prison,

And this is the phrase that gave us fits. What does 'the spirits in prison mean?' The question was, "Did Jesus go to hell when he died?" Where did Jesus spend those three days between the cross and the empty tomb? Peter never uses the word 'hell.' Two things we need to keep in mind as we try to understand this passage.

1. Who has the power over death? I'll put it on the screen:

Hebrews 2:14 (NIV)

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--

Satan had the power of death, Jesus took it away. When did he take it away? He took it away between the cross and the empty tomb.

2. Where did everybody go when they died before the cross?

Luke 16. They went to Sheol or Hades, the realm of the dead. Hades with two compartments – the unrighteous went to a place of torment, the righteous went to a place of comfort, Abraham's bosom. Were they in the presence of God? No because final atonement had not yet been made. This is where the resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything. When Jesus died, he went to that spiritual realm, the realm of the dead, as the Old Testament describes it, Peter calls it a prison. And that's an important term to remember. It was a prison. What did Jesus do? He did two things:

1. He proclaimed victory over death.

Imagine the excitement of those Old Testament saints who had waited for the promise. The day is finally here, David knew it would come, that God would not abandon his soul. For three days, Jesus proclaimed victory over death, over the powers of this age. Revelation 1 tells us Jesus has the keys to death and Hades. And when he left the grave three days later with the keys to death and Hades he proved once and for all that the gates of hell would not prevail against the kingdom of God. And along with the keys,

2. He took those Old Testament saints out of the realm of the dead, out of that prison and transported them into the presence of God.

The Ascension

Ephesians 4:8-10; Acts 7:55-59; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

When Jesus left Hades, the realm of the dead, remember there are two groups there, he left one group in Hades, the unrighteous, the unbelievers. But he took those in the bosom of Abraham into the presence of God.

Ephesians 4:8-10

⁸Therefore it says, ^(A) "When he ascended on high ^(B) he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

Some of your study bibles might tell you that the captives refer to the demonic realm over which Jesus claimed victory when he went to Hades. But I believe it's referring to all those saints who were waiting, as Hebrews 12:23 says to be made perfect through the cross. Hades was a prison for them because they had to wait to receive the promise. And it makes more sense because it says Jesus led them, the question is where did he lead them?

⁹^(C) In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into ^(D) the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ^(E) ascended ^(E) far above all the heavens, that he might ^(C) fill all things.)

Far above all the heavens; Paul, in 2 Corinthians said he went to the third heaven and he called it paradise. Where did Jesus lead the captives? He led them to heaven which Paul called paradise. Now, this is interesting, because I just told you, in the comfort part of Hades, it's called paradise. Jesus told the thief on the cross, today, you will be with me in paradise. So, where is paradise now?

Jesus called it the bosom of Abraham; to the Old Testament believer (before the resurrection) they would consider this paradise. It wasn't their final destination but it was a place of comfort. Paul said, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. When did he say that? He said that after the resurrection. Here's my understanding of this: Every believer who died before the resurrection went to paradise in Hades. Every believer who dies after the resurrection but before the second coming goes to paradise, in the presence of the Lord.

Revelation 2:7

^(A) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ^(B) To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of ^(C) the tree of life, which is in ^(D) the paradise of God.' Ephesians 4 tells us that Jesus led the captives of paradise in Hades to the paradise in heaven. Before the resurrection, paradise was a place of comfort located in the realm of the dead. Why? Because: atonement for sin had not yet been made. Old covenant believers died and went down to paradise awaiting the presence of God. Now that atonement has been completed; when new covenant believers die they go up to paradise to be in the presence of God.

The Consummation

The consummation is the fulfillment of human history, this is the second coming of Christ. Paul is talking about what happens too all of us, those who have died, and those still living when Jesus comes back. Talk of the second coming generates all kinds of questions. And I've stated what I believe to be the core issues when it comes to this topic. Two things you need to know that are absolutely critical to your faith.

1. Jesus is coming again.
2. You need to be ready.

Whenever it happens and however it happens is important but its secondary to your understanding and believing that Jesus will, in fact come again, and you do not want to be caught unaware of his return.

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, ^(A) that you may not grieve as others do ^(B) who have no hope. ¹⁴For ^(C) since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

In other words, Jesus has taken the keys of death and has taken the paradise of Hades and all its inhabitants and transferred paradise to heaven. And when the time comes all those in paradise in heaven will return with Christ and gather up all those believers who never saw death in this life and bring them back to where? Where are they going to go now? there is yet another paradise after the second coming that is different than the

one you and I go too after we die. John said in Revelation 21, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” Jesus said in John 14 in my father’s house are many rooms and when he comes again, he will take us to that place he has prepared for us. Not until the second coming do we enter our final home. We all do it together. It doesn’t matter when you lived or died, Old Testament believer or New Testament; we all enter the new heaven together. But that’s a topic for another day.

One Question to Ask: AM I READY TO GO?

You need to understand this – when you die, your eternity is eternally fixed. Death seals the destiny of every human being. And where you end up will never be, can never be changed.

Connection Card

Next Week: Read 1 Corinthians 35-58

Text Your Questions to 219-379-7147